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Paul Rubell

Activity spike may have caused temporary opt out Facebook bans

By: Claude Solnik ⓘ April 20, 2016 🗨️ 0

After roughly a half a dozen Common Core critics were temporarily restricted from posting on their Facebook group pages, speculation started as to whether they had been hacked or targeted by groups unhappy with their message.

But an attorney specializing in social media cases said the temporary lockouts may very well have resulted not from the content, but spikes in activity as the pages essentially went viral when these tests were given.

Facebook didn't provide comments or messages explaining what occurred, leading to speculation that individuals or groups had flagged the pages or posts, leading to a kind of lockout of their administrators.

But Paul Rubell, a partner in the corporate department focusing on privacy and social media at Meltzer, Lippe, Goldstein & Breitstone in Mineola, thinks the sites may be victims of their own success.

He said that temporary and permanent bans often result from overuse of Facebook features, copyright claims and harassment or abuse.

He believes, however, that in this case content, complaints and copyright probably had nothing to do with the temporarily bans, which may have resulted from upticks of activity.

"They're very algorithmic," Rubell said of Facebook. "If certain metrics are hit, they turn you off for a temporary period of time. Part of it is bandwidth, taking too much resources."

As Common Core testing began, sites' use may have soared, leading to thousands of posts, potentially triggering a sort of "brake" or cooling off period for the sites.

Members also repeatedly posted an article from The Washington Post, which had been posted at one page, before the administrator was restricted.

While the spike in activity could have led to the restrictions, a surge in posting that article also could have been a

"Facebook said, 'What's going on? Let's take a pause, a breather,'" Rubell said. "It allows resumption. Then they analyze whether that activity resumes or not."

Although it's hard to know whether that occurred for sure, it seems to fit certain other information. The activists and educators weren't blocked on their personal site. And people who posted the article on their personal site didn't face consequences.

Harassment claims are more likely to lead to permanent bans. And it's not even easy to get Facebook to react to claims regarding hate speech.

"There can be real claims and bogus claims. People can say, 'John Doe is abusing me, harassing me' to get them taken down," Rubell said. "Typically, a temporary block is not an abuse claim. An abuse claim is you're out."

Deutermann said it simply isn't easy to get someone removed from posting. She said her group tried to do that to someone who put up numerous posts that she described as anti-Muslim, which appeared as if they had her group's support.

"She puts up a post. We all go in and flag it and it's still not taken down," Deutermann continued. "It's not easy to get someone banned from Facebook for 24 hours. Facebook really should be notifying us as to why. This is well known people it's happening to. They should at least offer an explanation. It's education activists."

Rubell said sites like Twitter and YouTube like spikes in activity. Not so Facebook, which wants to make sure pages aren't gobbling up huge amounts of band width suddenly.

"They block you from the functionality you're exceeding. Sometimes going viral can result in you being taken down for a period of time," Rubell added. "It's not an absolute block. It's a restriction of a part of your use of Facebook."

The only way to be sure about what happened is to hear from Facebook, which hasn't explained the pauses to individuals or replied to requests for this article. But Rubell believes volume not any desire to quiet voices caused the problem.

"To me, it's pretty clear what happened. It's the going viral," Rubell said. "There was too much activity on a given page in a short period of time. Facebook said take a breather."

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